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### THE ROVING EYE

#### Pure War in Tehran

By Pepe Escobar

I've just spent a frantic week in Tehran. Before departure, I had made a conscious decision; only one book in the backpack. Maximum concentration. I ended up choosing *Pure War*, the 2008 reprint by Semiotext(e) in LA of the 1983 Paul Virilio classic I had picked up at the revamped Foyles in London a few days back.

For a roving correspondent, going to Iran is always extra-special. Getting a press visa approved usually takes ages. This was my sixth trip - and I had no visa. Just a number, tied to a visa at the airport. Until the last minute, I thought I'd be deported from Imam Khomeini International - back to Abu Dhabi, which is now pretending to bomb The Caliph. Then, a small miracle; a VIP room, a visa in 10 minutes and the next I know I'm zooming into

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an eerily deserted Tehran at sunrise on a Friday, past the psychedelic space station decked in green that is Imam Khomeini's shrine.

Why Virilio? Because he was the first to conceptualize that with the explosion of asymmetrical warfare, Total War had become local - on a global scale. I expanded on the theme in my 2007 book *Globalistan* and in my writings. Washington and Tel Aviv had been threatening to bomb Iran for years. Virilio was the first to assert that "peace" merely extends war by other means.

*May 1968 as a theatre of the mind - a theatre of the imagination. When society could be an artwork, a performance, with the crowds in the street as the chorus. The last creative reaction against consumerism. "Power to the imagination".*

A beautiful sunny morning in front of the Foreign Ministry compound. An exhibition/installation about the "imposed" - as it's widely known - Iran-Iraq war. A reconstructed minefield; a map of nations weaponizing Saddam; pictures of young fighters/martyrs who wouldn't have been older than 14. A theatre of painful remembrance. In late 1978, Tehran also had its crowds in the streets as chorus - against the shah. Khomeini was a reaction

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against consumerism; but was he "power to the imagination"? And then, all was engulfed in a theatre of cruelty - the tragedy of the "imposed" war.

*War in the journalistic sense is national delinquency elevated to the scale of an extremely important conflict - It's the equivalent of the "tumults", as ancient societies called them. We can no longer even speak of wars, they are interstate delinquencies. It's State terrorism.*

In Tehran, my immensely gracious hosts were the organizers of New Horizon: the International Conference of Independent Thinkers. After plenty of twists and turns, the Foreign Ministry ended up also being involved. The conference issued a important resolution condemning ISIS/ISIL/The Caliph; Zionism; Islamophobia; sectarianism; and Washington's blind support for anything Israel unleashes over Palestine: Israel's national delinquency, or State terrorism. The conference also called for cooperation and understanding between the West and Islam: that implies a struggle against interstate delinquencies.

*The best defense is to attack; and to attack you must have some ideas; right now there aren't any ideas. Imagination today is in the image, and the image is in power. There's no imagination for anything but the image.*

I have to leave a fabulous open-air traditional Persian dinner to go to Press TV studios for a debate with notorious neo-con Daniel Pipes about ISIS/ISIL/Daesh. We surprisingly agree more than I would normally expect. Well, not hard considering the Obama administration's non-strategy "strategy": an image (bombs and Tomahawks) fighting an image (The Caliph's carefully edited beheading show).

Meanwhile, President Hassan Rouhani's speech at the United Nations kept making waves; "Extremists threaten our neighbors, resort to violence and shed blood." It's "the people in the region who can deliver" in the fight against The Caliph. Rouhani was not exactly referring to the made in USA jets allegedly deployed by the Gulf Cooperation Council coalition of the clueless/cowards; the House of Saud, UAE, Bahrain and associate member Jordan.

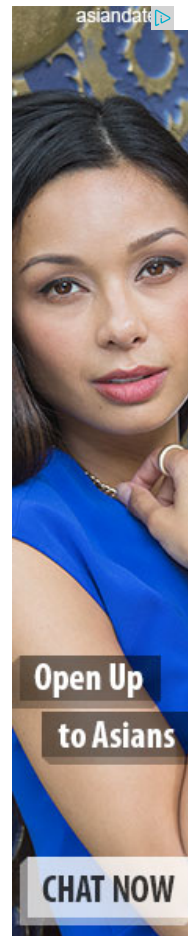
In all my conversations, a consensus emerges; the power vacuum of post-2013 Shock and Awe and occupation led to the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq and eventually ISIS/ISIL/Daesh. But even as Tehran and Washington may have flirted about a joint move against The Caliph, Washington then denied it wanted help and Tehran rejected it outright.

Still, what Rouhani said in New York kept echoing day after day everywhere in Tehran; weaponizing the "new" Free Syrian Army in Saudi Arabia, of all places, amounts "to train another group of terrorists and send them to Syria to fight". And Washington's "strategy" is further enabling hardcore Sunni dictators who've made their careers demonizing Shi'ites.

And then that other "unofficial" Caliph, neo-Ottoman Recep Tayyip Erdogan, stepped in; there would be no use of Turkish "territory" or "military bases" by the "coalition" if "the objective does not also include ousting the Bashar al-Assad regime". Who needs Caliph Erdogan to fight Caliph Ibrahim? Major General Qassem Suleimani, head of the Iranian Quds Force, can do it; his picture, side by side with Kurdish peshmergas, made a splash all over Iran when published by IRINN.

*The cinema shows us what our consciousness is. Our consciousness is an effect of montage - It's a collage. There is only collage, cutting and splicing. This explains fairly well what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls the disappearance of the great narratives. Classless society, social justice - no one believes in them anymore. We're in the age of micro-narratives, the art of the fragment.*

The joy of Laleh park - a Persian park crisscrossed by stray Persian cats as well as accomplished volleyball and badminton players and pram-pushing families. That's where Arash Darya-Bandari, medievalist extraordinaire with many years spent in the Bay Area, gives me a crash course on the finer points of one of the great surviving narratives; Shi'ism and Khomeini's concept of *velayat-e-faqih*. In Pure Non-War terms, this was always supposed to be about social justice. And that's why it's unintelligible to turbo-capitalism.



The park as Agora; a garden of intellectual delights. Nearly all my top conversations took place walking across or around Laleh park. And then one night, I went for a solitary walk, just to find a revolutionary movie/performance on a makeshift stage, complete with a trench and mortars. An audience of a few solitary men and some scattered families. The cinema keeping the consciousness of the Iran-Iraq war alive.

*The end of deterrence corresponds to the beginning of the information war, a conflict where the superiority of information is more important than the capability to inflict damage.*

The New Horizon conference could not but be about information war. The overall theme was the fight against the Zionist lobby. Everyone knows what the lobby means and how it operates, especially in the US. And yet, in my short interventions, at the Foreign Ministry and at the conference, I preferred to focus on its global financial/economic reach. Follow the money. That's the only way to pierce the lobby's seemingly invincible armory.

Another face of information war. Everywhere I went, I had the pleasure to see how Gareth Porter's book - [Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iranian Nuclear Scare](#) - was received as a blessing. The book was translated into Farsi by the Fars News Agency, in only two months, with meticulous care, and launched in a simple ceremony.

It's bound to become a best seller - as it conclusively proves, for instance, how the Iranian "plot" to equip missiles with nuclear warheads was entirely fabricated by the terrorist outfit Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) and then handed over to the International Atomic Energy Agency by the Mossad. Contrast the respect shown to Gareth in Tehran to the wall of silence of its US reception - just another reflection of the 35-year-old "wilderness of mirrors" opposing Washington to Tehran.

Predictably, the usual illiterate morons in the US dubbed the conference as an "anti-Semite hate fest". Gareth was described as "an anti-Israel journalist" and myself as "a Brazilian anti-Israel journalist". Obviously the moronic inferno is not familiar with the concept of "foreign policy".

*Space is no longer in geography - it's in electronics. Unity is in the terminals. It's in the instantaneous time of command posts, multinational headquarters, control towers, etc. Politics is less in physical space than in the time systems administered by various technologies. ? There is a movement from geo- to chronopolitics: the distribution of territory becomes the distribution of time. The distribution of territory is outmoded, minimal.*

Time to go to the bazaar - the ultimate urban distribution of territory. At the main entrance, a gaggle brandishing calculators and pieces of paper is involved in an incredible racket. With Roberto Quaglia - author of a wicked debunking of the 9/11 saga - we joke this looks like a slaves market. Not really. This is nothing less than a futures market on the course of the rial. With the national currency fluctuating so much because of the sanctions - it lost three quarters of its value in the past few years - the chance to make a bundle is irresistible.

We meet the beautiful Zahra - she sells handmade towels but is essentially a killer fashion photographer. And then the ritual I've loved since forever; haggling for the perfect tribal rug. In this case, a Zaghol from the 1930s, never to be reproduced because the local nomads are becoming sedentary and there are no new weavers. A case of distribution of territory becoming the distribution of (lost) time.

*The Pharaohs, the Romans, the Greeks were surveyors. That was geopolitics. We're no longer there, we're in chronopolitics. Organization, prohibitions, interruptions, orders, powers, structurings, subjections are now in the realm of temporality. And that's also where resistance should be.*

Which lead us, once again, to sanctions. Much had been made of what Rouhani told Austrian President Hans Fisher at the UN - about Iran being ready to deliver gas to the European Union. That's not happening tomorrow; the last figure I had, in Tehran, years ago, is that the country would need at least US\$200 billion in investments to upgrade its energy infrastructure. Rouhani was [forced to clarify](#) it. And Tehran won't sell itself to the EU on the cheap.

The end of sanctions is all about chronopolitics.

*We have entered an age of large-scale terrorism. Just as we speak of petty delinquency and major delinquency, I think the same should be said of petty and major terrorism. ... The military-industrial and scientific complexes continue to function on their own momentum. It's a crazy engine that won't stop.*

Tehran thinks about the crazy engine all the time. I'm sort of "kidnapped" from a meeting and end up in a small think tank with a fabulous map on the wall detailing the US command centers. All the students are eager to know what the Empire is really up to with Iran.

A visit to the "nest of spies" - the former US embassy - is also inevitable. An apotheosis of 1970s technology - immaculately preserved like nowhere else in the world; radio equipment, proto-computers, telephones, telexes, rolodexes, a "forgery room" for fake passports. No wonder Washington could never recover from the loss of this sterling listening post of the whole Middle East. Will this building ever be a "normal" US embassy again? Someone should ask the hick [Hamlet](#) who almost turned into a mad bomber.

*This is why the airport today has become the new city. ? People are no longer citizens, they're passengers in transit. No longer a nomad society, in the sense of the great nomadic drifts, but one concentrated on the vector of transportation. The new capital is ... a city at the intersection of practicabilities of time, in other words, of speed.*

The last day had to contain an epiphany. I waited for it all day long - amid myriad interviews and a fabulous Indian lunch in North Tehran with Gareth and Dr Marandi of the Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran; the ideal Platonic banquet of conviviality and intellect. Then, at night, a mad dash across town to the Rey shrine; working-class neighborhood, foundation stone of Tehran, one of the top pilgrimage sites in Iran alongside Qom and Mashhad.

Aesthetic illumination meets sensorial overload meets spiritual pull - with an extra kick because you're arguably the only Westerner in sight. Tens of thousands of pilgrims honor the death of Imam Ali's son-in-law. What's that thing about the death of grand narratives? Not in deep Iran.

And then it's all over, as in a Coleridge dream; did I dream this fleeting Persian interlude, or did Tehran dreamed a little dream of me? I'm back to my default mode - the essential passenger in transit; a nomad carpet, a backpack and a boarding pass. Next stop; a faceless city in an intersection of speed.

**Pepe Escobar** is the author of [Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War](#) (Nimble Books, 2007), [Red Zone Blues: a snapshot of Baghdad during the surge](#) (Nimble Books, 2007), and [Obama does Globalistan](#) (Nimble Books, 2009).

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**Mark Thomason** · Top Commenter · Harvard Law School

"that "peace" merely extends war by other means."

True. But really that is what Clausewitz was telling us about politics, when he wrote that war was a continuation of politics with additional means.

War only adds organized killing as a means to the other means used by politics in foreign policy.

That concept of politics was happening before the killing, it continues during the killing, and will continue after the killing. That concept of politics is vicious and nasty just like war, but without organized killing.

It is all the same goal pursued in the same way for the same reasons, just with or without killing added.

Americans are wrong to think that war is different from peace, in any way but the killing. It is a conceit, and one that contradicts our own behavior at every opportunity from the beginning of our country.

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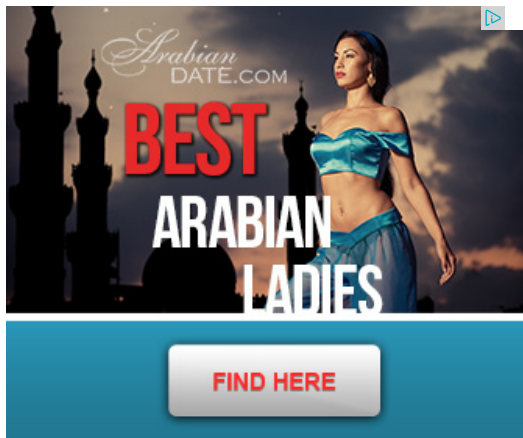


**Abdullah Manzoor** · Kuwait City

"Someone should ask the hick Hamlet who almost turned into a mad bomber." Hahahaha but awww, Jimmy's awesome!

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